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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

CPA FOR HATFIELD  
DEPT FOR EB/TRA/BYERLY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAIR](#) [ETRD](#) [EINV](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: USG PERSONNEL DISADVANTAGED BY AMMAN-BAGHDAD AIR  
PROTOCOLS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

[1](#)1. ACTION RECOMMENDATION AT PARA 6.

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Personnel from various U.S. and other governments' agencies have expressed concern over a shortage of capacity on flights into and out of Baghdad via Amman. Restrictions on the use of the two carriers currently operating under CPA mandate have led to USG passengers being assigned a low priority, creating a bottleneck in travel and forcing personnel to travel more dangerous overland routes in some cases. Royal Jordanian, which is permitted to provide humanitarian support on a case-by-case basis, is not likely to offer additional slots in Amman to competing carriers to increase capacity given its desire to be the primary carrier, humanitarian or otherwise, on the route. An agreement that permits an additional carrier to operate an Amman-Baghdad route that gives priority to personnel traveling on USG business appears to be the optimum solution.  
END SUMMARY

[1](#)3. (SBU) Two carriers currently provide regular humanitarian-related charter air service into Baghdad: Air Serv, a non-profit carrier, funded through USAID; and a UN charter. Air Serv offers once-daily service six days per week, while the UN operates two flights per day five days per week. RJ is permitted to offer humanitarian support flights to Baghdad on a case-by-case basis. Commercial air service to Baghdad is not yet viable due to security concerns.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Post MAP and Econ sections have been made aware of recent difficulties USG personnel face when attempting to travel via air to or from Baghdad on official business. Under a grant protocol it has with USAID, Air Serv has three levels of priority for its Amman-Baghdad-Amman service: USAID personnel have precedence, followed by international and other non-governmental humanitarian organizations, and finally "others qualified", a catch-all category that includes journalists, business people with some humanitarian link, and government officials. However, Air Serv capacity is presently only 14-20 seats per flight, and they fill up quickly. The UN flights have similar priority considerations for UN officials and NGOs, leaving little room for anyone else. As national carrier and previously-exclusive operator of the Amman-Baghdad route, RJ is unwilling to offer additional slots at its Amman hub to Air Serv, the UN, or any other carrier it sees as competition, either current or future, for its service to Baghdad.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Consequently, USG officials and other diplomatic personnel have few alternatives. (Note: While an overland route from Amman to Baghdad is available and oft-traveled, the journey can potentially be dangerous. A MAP contact told us that a group of Germans, including the German Charge for Baghdad, were attacked on the Amman-Baghdad road last week and had to be rescued. END NOTE) Many missions are delayed or scrapped entirely, due to the inability of officials to fit into the priority categories.

[1](#)6. (SBU) RECOMMENDATION: As the current set-up does not allow for needed access to Baghdad for USG and other governments' personnel, it would be in our interests to support approval for a charter arrangement to accommodate the USG/diplomatic community's needs. Options that have been discussed include: securing GOJ approval for additional Air Serv flights, giving priority to USG personnel; arranging for RJ charter service for USG and diplomatic passengers; or supporting a charter service from a third location, such as Aqaba or Cyprus. (NOTE: Under an MOU reached with Aqaba Special Economic Zone Chief Commissioner Akel Biltaji, a private charter service is currently operating out of Aqaba, out of RJ's reach. END NOTE) MAP officials at post are ready to work with local authorities at both ends to make this happen, pending Department guidance. END COMMENT  
HALE